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Governor's Children's Cabinet Launches Louisiana Kids' Dashboard to Track Children's Well-Being

BATON ROUGE – For the first time, Louisiana families, policymakers and advocates have a central, easily accessible website to track numerous indicators of children's well-being, including health outcomes, educational progress and poverty level. This allows the public, at a glance, to see how the State compares nationally and what progress is being made.

Typically, these indicators were tracked by different state agencies that have children's programs and services to address them. Now, there is a central location to monitor children's well-being and Louisiana's progress at addressing these indicators. Five State agencies, led by the Governor's Children's Cabinet, have combined their data to create the Louisiana Kids' Dashboard, available at www.kidsdashboard.la.gov. The dashboard is an easily accessible, online resource that helps policymakers, service providers, parents and other stakeholders see multiple well-being indicators in a single location.

"This is an important starting point for all of us to work together and improve the lives of Louisiana's children," said Dr. Tiffany Simpson, Executive Director of the Governor's Children's Cabinet. "For years, we operated in silos, and people couldn't see all the information at once. Now, we are giving easy access to everything we track on children's well-being indicators so we can monitor progress in real time and make better-informed decisions."

The Children's Cabinet held a press conference to officially launch Louisiana Kids' Dashboard today during its monthly advisory board meeting.

Louisiana Kids' Dashboard shows 16 indicators, divided among the categories Health Care, Education and Well-Being. Each indicator shows the baseline, current and target levels, and displays trends to indicate if Louisiana is doing better, worse or the same as the baseline for that indicator. The Kids' Dashboard indicators are national measurements, the same as those tracked through the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kaiser Family Foundation and other organizations that issue comparisons of children's well-being by states.

The indicators on Louisiana Kids' Dashboard are tracked through Department of Children and Family Services, Department of Education, Department of Health and Hospitals, Louisiana Workforce Commission, and Office of Juvenile Justice.

The Department of Children and Family Services Kids' Dashboard indicators measure children living in poverty, child support collections, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) participation among eligible families, and decreasing repeat instances of child abuse, neglect or maltreatment.

"As a department, we monitor performance measures daily to ensure the well-being, safety and permanency of Louisiana's children and as part of our commitment to continuous improvement," DCFS Secretary Suzy Sonnier said. "The Kids' Dashboard gives the public better access to this information and our citizens a seat at the table in tracking the state's progress, joining the state's child-serving agencies to promote the best outcomes for Louisiana's children."

The Department of Education Kids' Dashboard indicators measure students arriving in kindergarten ready to learn, students arriving at fourth grade on-time and on-level and students graduating on time.

"Nearly half of all kids entering kindergarten aren't ready to start learning, even though the majority of them participated in a publicly-funded pre-k program," said John White, State Superintendent of Education. "Sadly, many students who start behind in school continue to fall behind. We need to do better, and we can do better. Thanks to the leadership of the Governor and the Legislature, Louisiana is reorganizing our policies to ensure each and every child starts school with the best chance for a lifetime of success. This collaboration between agencies will play a critical role as Louisiana strives to ensure the educational success, health and overall well-being of our children. By starting early, we are getting kids - even as young as 3 and 4 - on the right track for college."

The Department of Health and Hospitals Kids' Dashboard indicators measure low birth-weight babies, childhood obesity, immunizations for children 19-35 months and 13-17 years, and asthma-related hospitalizations.

"We often discuss programs and policies in terms of budgets and allocations, but the Kids' Dashboard puts human faces on our work to make Louisiana a better, healthier place for children to grow up," said DHH Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein. "As administrators of public programs that are responsible for promoting the health of Louisiana's kids, we have to be accountable for the outcomes our programs produce. And if you can't measure it, you can't imagine it, so this is what really matters. We can all watch to see how well we are doing collectively at making meaningful, sustainable progress for children and youth."

Louisiana Workforce Commission Kids' Dashboard indicators measure youth placed in employment or education and youth attaining high school degrees or certification.

"It's our shared responsibility to provide the best courses of education and training for our children to prepare them for productive, working lives that enable them to support themselves and their families," said Curt Eysink, Louisiana Workforce Commission Executive Director.

Office of Juvenile Justice Kids' Dashboard indicators measure children/youth's length of stay in non-secure, out-of-home placements (custody) and recidivism rates among incarcerated youth.

"The well-being of Louisiana's children is perhaps the most important element in decreasing the number of youth involved with the juvenile justice system, and ensuring public safety," said OJJ Deputy Secretary Dr. Mary L. Livers. "OJJ is very pleased to be a part of the Kids' Dashboard initiative, which shines a spotlight on the issues facing Louisiana's children and families, and provides down-to-earth, useful information for parents, the most important stakeholders involved in child welfare. From vital statistics

specific to Louisiana to national standards and rankings, the Kids' Dashboard website contains a wealth of information of use to all stakeholders – that means everyone who cares about children and the future of our state. I hope you will be pleased, and we encourage your feedback.”

The Louisiana Kids' Dashboard will be updated on a regular basis, and contains social media links so residents can follow Kids' Dashboard on Facebook and Twitter to see updated information.

“Our goal in the coming years is to grow Louisiana Kids' Dashboard and add other significant indicators,” Simpson said. “Most importantly, we feel that by combining all these data into one place, we are positioning ourselves to see more effective program management and children's well-being improvements.”

For more information about the Louisiana Kids' Dashboard, contact the Children's Cabinet at 225-342-3327.